



San Diego County DPLU News

February 2009

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IMPORTANT FEBRUARY DATES FOR ADVANCE PLANNING:

- Feb. 13 Planning Commission:
Accessory Dwelling Unit
streamlining
- Feb. 25 Board of Supervisors:
Meteorological Testing
Facilities
- Feb. 28 Steering Committee

For more information and additional
upcoming meetings, please visit the
Calendar on our Web Site at
[www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/
index.html](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/index.html).

From the Director

Hello everyone,

It's February, the shortest month of the year --- and a time when I'm sure we're all hoping that it won't take long for the economy to turn around. I know that times have been tough for everyone. Our Building Division once again had to reduce its staffing levels because of the downturn. Even so, our department continues to work hard on your important projects and to make our land use process easier to understand and navigate for our customers.

This month we opened our Quick Business Counter (which you can read more about on page three). We are also reviewing the many comments we've received about our draft General Plan Update. We continue to move forward on our MSCP plans. We hope you enjoy this newsletter.

Until next month,
- Eric Gibson, Director

Advance Planning News

General Plan Update

Public Review of Draft General Plan

After a 60-day public review beginning on November 14, 2008 comments were due on January 16th for the Draft General Plan Update. Comments that were received by the County during the review period are now posted to the County website. County staff is reviewing the submitted comments and will release a revised draft of the draft plan later in 2009 along with the Draft Environmental Impact Report. The General Plan Update is on project schedule for adoption in Fall 2010.

County of San Diego 2009 Legislative Program

On January 27th the Board of Supervisors adopted the 2009 Legislative program. Included in this program was the adoption of Sponsorship Proposals recommended by the Steering Committee and Department of Planning and Land Use to pursue reform in California Housing Element and Density Bonus law to make them more appropriate for unincorporated areas.

Excerpts of the proposals are below, more information can be found searching in the Clerk of the Board's [Document Management System](#) (January 27, 2009; Agenda Item 15).



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What are General Plans?

General Plans guide community development. They set the general philosophy and policies that determine what gets built where — how communities will accommodate growth while preserving character and protecting what the community values.

The County's General Plan Update would improve the current plan by balancing growth with the need to control traffic congestion, protect the environment, and ease the strain on essential services such as water supplies and fire protection.

That will be accomplished in part by shifting 20 percent of future growth to western unincorporated communities with established infrastructure such as roads.

The General Plan Update would reduce the growth that the current general plan would allow by 15 percent. But it would still allow 168,000 to 198,000 more people to live in the unincorporated communities that now house roughly 492,000 people.

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Advanced Planning

Advisory Group Meetings

The Steering Committee has a meeting scheduled for February 28, 2009. The meeting is intended to be a forum for Community Planning and Sponsor Group Chairs to discuss comments and provide a forum to develop a Steering Committee position the Draft General Plan.

Community Plan Update

We are currently reviewing the Community Plans that our community planning and sponsor groups have submitted. We plan to contact those groups in the next couple months to continue our coordination on their plans. For questions contact your Community Planning/Sponsor Group Chair or County staff at gpupdate.DPLU@sdcounty.ca.gov

Policy and Ordinance Development

Wind Turbine Testing and Residential Turbines

On September 24, 2008, the Board of Supervisors directed staff to return with options for the processing of Meteorological (MET) Testing Facilities and residential wind turbines. DPLU is currently drafting amendments to the Zoning Ordinance which would allow the placement of METs with an Administrative Permit. Staff is also working on options to present to the Board of Supervisors regarding wind turbine facilities, particularly residential turbine facilities. The Zoning Ordinance amendment for MET Facilities and the wind turbine options will be presented to the Board of Supervisors on February 25, 2009.

Farm Employee Housing

Advance Planning staff is in the process of proposing changes to the Zoning Ordinance that would make existing Farm Employee Housing regulations consistent with State law. The Negative Declaration prepared for the Zoning Ordinance and draft Ordinance will be available for public review in February and can be accessed at the [DPLU Public Review Webpage](#).

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Did You Know?

- The County's draft General Plan Update is 269 pages long and has 22 full page maps — and its appendices add another 136 pages and 60 maps.
- The GP Update will provide the land use guidelines for 26 different community areas and the unincorporated County's 3,572 square miles.
- That "General Plans" in California date back to 1927, when the State Legislature authorized local governments to establish planning commissions to create "master plans" to determine communities' land use. (Source: Guide to California Planning)
- That planners must consider six other elements aside from Land Use when they create general plans in California? They are: Circulation (transportation), Conservation, Housing, Open Space, Noise and Safety.

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Advanced Planning

Landscape Ordinance Update

Looking to find ways to improve local water conservation, the Board of Supervisors directed DPLU on Oct. 15, 2008 to re-search the status of regional efforts to create a "model landscape ordinance." The State's [draft model ordinance](#) was made available for review on November 26, 2008. Staff is working with local water agencies and other jurisdictions to look into the possibility of creating a regional model ordinance. Staff will return to the Board on this matter in early 2009.

Accessory Dwelling Units

Advance Planning staff is processing an amendment to the San Diego County Zoning Ordinance to simplify the various accessory dwelling types and streamline the associated regulations. The amendment would reduce the number of accessory units into two types: Second Dwelling Units and Guest Living Quarters, and proposes changes to the limitations on said units. The proposed ordinance amendments can be accessed on the [DPLU Advance Planning website](#). This Zoning Ordinance Amendment will be heard before the County Planning Commission on February 13, 2009.

View our website for more information at: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/advancedplanning.html, or www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate.

Building Division News

Improving Our Process

This month, the Building Division introduced a new "Quick Business" counter to cut wait times for customers who have simple permit business that can be completed in 15 minutes or less.

The "Quick Counter" started Feb. 2 and will run from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Mondays through Fridays at our Ruffin Road office.

Before we started the new service, customers who had quick business such as replacing a water heater had to wait in the same lines as applicants processing larger, more complicated and time-consuming business, such as getting permits to build a house or commercial business.

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Important Building Division Telephone Numbers

Building Offices: (858) 694-2960

Toll Free: (800) 411-0017

2003, 2007 Wildfire Survivors:
(858) 694-3876

Online, not in Line

The Department of Planning and Land Use and the Building Division have created several Web-based tools to help customers — by reducing wait times and offering new services people can use without coming to County offices. Here are some of those!

Kivanet Public: Research building permit and property histories online. <http://landinfo.sdcounty.ca.gov/Index.cfm>

Kivanet Citizen: Apply for some building permits via the Internet. <http://sdcounty.luegepay.com/kivanet/citizen/>

Building Permit Estimator Calculator: Find out how much your building permit will cost. <http://sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html#feest>

weekly. http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldg/bldg_waits.html

Downloadable Plot Plan Templates: Save time by filing plot plans right the first time. <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html>

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Building Division News

Now, much like the “ten-items or less” lines at supermarkets, planning customers with quick business will have their own lines and move much faster. The Building Division is not adding staff to handle the new counter, but shifting existing staff members to run the line for two hours a day.

Some of the business the Quick Counter will handle includes:

- Pick up plans.
- Pay bills.
- Answer general questions about the planning process.
- Process miscellaneous permits for:
 - Minor electrical system upgrades.
 - Service Upgrades or relocations.
 - Septic-to-sewer conversions.
 - Copper re-piping.
 - Gas line work.
 - Drainage and sewer repair work.

Fee Adjustments

The County is reluctantly increasing its permit fees, slightly, beginning April 10.

Our department did not want to increase fees, but needed to in order to avoid an even higher cost for our customers ---- an extreme increase in our permit processing times.

The County's Building Division is a full-cost recovery program, meaning that its operating budget comes from the fees that it collects. When the economy crashes and permit business and fee revenue decreases, the Building Division cuts costs and reduces staffing levels to adjust. But reducing staffing levels too far creates longer permit-processing times.

Our customers have repeatedly told us that the best way to help them is to keep processing times low. Our moderate fee increases are intended to dodge potentially extreme processing time increases by trying to keep staffing levels stable.

At the same time, we have cut costs. Over the last two years the Building Division has cut personnel from 105 staff members to 55

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Wait Time Charts: Find out when our counters are busiest and avoid the rush. Charts based on monthly averages and updated weekly. www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldg_waits.html

Other Important Online Sites:

Building Division:
www.sdcounty.ca.gov/building

Building Forms:
www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html

Zoning Ordinance:
www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/zoning/index.html

All of our online services can be found at the DPLU main Web site at www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu

Building by the numbers:

Average Wait times: (Through December)

Building Counters: 18 min.

Building Proj. Pre-Submittal Counter: 21 minutes

Zoning Counters: 16 minutes

Building Permits Issued:

142 (December)

Code Enforcement:

Responded to 202 complaints
(December)

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and closed its satellite offices in San Marcos and El Cajon. DPLU adjusts its fees annually to avoid creating huge spikes.

The overall average fee increase was just under 4%. The average fee increase for permits to build homes was \$129.

Saving Steps, Saving Time

Customers may soon find themselves having to walk less, and visit County offices less often, when they process building permits.

The Building Division is working on a new "internal routing" system that could take effect in April.

Simply put, building staff — not customers — would hand-carry customers' plans from station-to-station during the permitting process. That means fewer steps and fewer visits. Mock-ups of the new system suggest it could slash the distances that customers have to walk by up to 55%.

In one example, the new routing system — measuring mileage from the initial Building Plan Process review to the issuing of a final permit — cut customers' travel distance from .87 miles to .39 miles.

Building Codes get Good Grades

DPLU's Building Division just received the second-highest grades possible for their building codes, showing that San Diego County is home to some of the most safely-constructed homes in California.

The Insurance Services Office --- an independent rating-advisory organization that serves the property-casualty insurance industry -- recently gave the County's residential building codes a "2" grade on a one-to-10 grading scale, with one being the highest and 10 the lowest. The rating put the County in the top 6% of 302 California planning agencies that were graded. The Building Division also scored a "three" out of 10 grade for its commercial building codes, putting it in the top 17% of graded agencies.

The ISO report said the ratings show County codes create safer buildings that can reduce the damage catastrophes like earthquakes can cause. The grades could also lower future flood-insurance rates for County residents and businesses.



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Multiple Species Conservation Programs are designed to let development and environmental preservation live comfortably side-by-side --- to let development continue in our County while still making sure to set aside environmentally important habitat to protect endangered plants and animals collectively, in groups, rather than one-by-one.

Multiple Species Conservation Plans do that by identifying sensitive land, and setting it aside --- either by buying it or creating incentives to leave it as preserves --- in linked blocks of habitat throughout the County.

The County is crafting its plan using computer modeling, and input from scientific advisors and the public. Planners take general information already known about San Diego County's native habitats --- coastal sage scrub, chaparral, grassland, vernal pools and others --- to determine where endangered plants and animals live. Computers then take that information and produce blocks of property that could become Multiple Species Conservation Plan areas. Over time, it is pieced together into a connected preserve system. That happens as development occurs and produces several ingredients needed for the MSCP recipe --- money to buy land, people willing to sell land, and the need to create environmental mitigation.

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Multiple Species Conservation Program

South County MSCP

Our South County MSCP was approved in 1997. Today we continue to acquire new land for it and monitor the land that has already been set aside.

In addition, we are working to create an amendment to the plan to recognize and protect the Quino Checkerspot butterfly.

In August, the Department of Planning and Land Use held its annual report workshop for the South County MSCP and celebrated its 10-year anniversary.

For additional information, please visit: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/sc.html.

North County MSCP

DPLU is also working with the state and federal wildlife agencies to create its North County MSCP. It is the second of the County's three MSCP plans and would help provide habitat for 63 plant and animal species in a 280,459 acre area.

We are revising a draft of the text material that will accompany the plan incorporating feedback we have received from stakeholders and the wildlife agencies.

We are scheduled to present the revised plan to the public and stakeholders this month.

For more information about the plan, please go to www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/nc.html.

East County MSCP

DPLU is working to create the East County MSCP with the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife and the California Department of Fish and Game.

In January, we held a Steering Committee meeting to discuss the plan after previously introducing the draft preserve map to the committee in December.



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Did you know?

- California has the second highest level of endangered species in the U. S., after Hawaii.
- San Diego County is one of the most biologically diverse counties in the contiguous U.S. with more than 400 rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species.
- San Diego County is home to 1,573 native plant species, 26 of which are unique to the area.

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Multiple Species Conservation Program

There were a number of questions about agricultural land at the January meeting. Our staff is reviewing those questions and plans to give a detailed report about how the plan would affect agricultural land to the committee when it meets again.

The draft map was created with GIS computer models and input from our Independent Science Advisor workshops. Those workshops helped identify the guidelines and principles we used to create the preserve, such as using focal species, goals and conservation assumptions for public land. We also used field surveys and meetings with the wildlife agencies to create design principles. Those included finding ways to make it easier for sensitive species to travel between preserved blocks of habitat and to reduce “edge effects” — the encroachment of invasive species into preserves from non-native landscaping in the places where preserves and developments meet.

When the East County plan is completed, it will help protect up to 153 sensitive plant and animal species in the 428,763 acre East County plan area.

To get more information, and to see the draft preserve map, please go to www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/ec.html.

San Diego Farming Program Plan

The Farming Program Plan represents the next step in implementing our Board of Supervisors policy that says farming in San Diego County is valuable and should be supported and encouraged.

The Farming Program Plan was accepted by the County Planning Commission in December and is tentatively scheduled to go to the Board of Supervisors for consideration March 25.

The plan aims to promote and protect San Diego County’s \$5 billion agriculture industry in a number of ways, including streamlining the regulatory environment for farmers and increasing dialogue between farmers and County agencies.